

We had \$127 billion more come into the budget in 1999 on Social Security than we actually paid out. Correction. That is, 1999 was projected to be \$127 billion. We have agreed to spend \$1 billion, or we think we have agreed because it is in conference now, in terms of the emergency spending bill, in terms of all of the tragedies that happened in South America. That brings us to \$126 billion.

We had a bill that spent an additional \$15 billion at the end of last year outside of the caps that we had agreed to. So that brought it down to \$111 billion. We had another billion dollars that was spent in agreement with the President in emergency appropriations.

So last year we stole \$17 billion of the Social Security surplus straight off the top.

What is going to happen this year, the expected surplus is \$138 billion in Social Security. The surplus for the general accounts is not near that. It is at actually a deficit.

If we do not accomplish what we said we would with this budget today, what will happen is we will be using Social Security money again to pay for things that we should be paying for with things other than Social Security dollars.

We will be undermining the Social Security system. We will not be honest about what we are doing here. We will have two sets of numbers again, one for the American people when we are campaigning and being politicians and trying to look good, and another that is the real world that someday we are going to have a day of reckoning when it comes to our kids.

The President put forth the budget that said, over the next 15 years, we spend only 38 percent of the Social Security surplus when we should not spend any of it. But even under his budget for the year 2000, he actually spends 42 percent of it on increased programs within the Federal Government.

Let us not spend any of the Social Security money. Another thing has struck me since I have been in Congress. I am a physician, obstetrician, family practice doctor. I delivered 97 babies last year while I was in Congress. So I go home every weekend. On Mondays, I still practice medicine, lots of times on Fridays, and every fourth weekend I am on call. So I get to talk to people about real problems, see the real issues that they are involved in.

It strikes me so peculiar that we talk so easy about these large numbers. The application is, when I have a senior citizen in my office, and they are not taking their medicine, and the reason they are not taking their medicine is because they cannot afford to take their medicine, that they are choosing between eating and taking the medicine that will extend their lives, that we have failed as a Nation under, quote, Social Security and Medicare to provide the things that we promised that we would provide.

The other thing that strikes me is that we heard the gentleman from North Carolina earlier say that the reason that we had this huge deficit was tax cuts in the future. We have two ways of affecting government funds. We can either spend more or less, that is one way, or we can raise taxes or lower taxes. It is one or the other. One is not better than the other when it comes to balancing our books. If in fact we need to cut spending, we can.

I cannot find one person in my district who thinks that the Federal Government is efficient; that it could not be. As a matter of fact, if one knows anything about the history of World War II, when this country had to improve efficiency, when we had a crisis that faced us, what we did is markedly reduce the cost of the bureaucracy of the Federal Government so that more dollars went into our ability to sustain the freedom that we all cherish.

We have that big of a crisis facing us today. It is not flashy. It is not great big. It is not in front of us all the time. But the fact is, is our children and our grandchildren, unless we have fiscal discipline, will have a markedly lower standard of living. We do not have any option to that except doing the right thing now.

I am going to close here in a minute. One of the things that I have learned in my short stint as a politician is that there is a lot of ways to look at things. There is a way to look at things if one wants to get reelected. There is a way to look at things if one wants to play ball up here with the politicians. There is a way to look at things if one wants to be able to sleep at night.

Martin Luther King in his last speech at the National Cathedral, his last major speech, said this: Cowardice asked the question, is it expedient? Vanity asked the question, is it popular? But conscience asked the question, is it right?

It is not right to steal Social Security money and use it in other things. It is not right to be dishonest with the American public about the budget numbers that we deal with every day.

It is not right to be untruthful about our situation in Yugoslavia or our trading relationships with China. They are equivalently the same in terms of the way they treat humans. They are both atrocious.

We have to live with ourselves. We have to demand the integrity and the statesmanship that is necessary for our freedom to operate.

As we spend more of one's money and we do not fulfill our obligations, we all lose freedom. I want freedom for my grandchildren. I want freedom for my children. I have three daughters, two sons-in-law, two grandchildren. My greatest dream is that they will have the opportunity to be free and succeed in a free society. That requires integrity in the Congress and requires integrity at every level in this government.

We can become much more efficient. We can do the right things. We do not

have to always be popular. We do not have to look for the expedient way. That is the way of the coward.

FARM CRISIS IN AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, as some of our colleagues discussed earlier this evening, rural America is in economic depression. Tonight I would like to ask the question of: Where is the beef? Where is the bill that is supposed to come out of this Congress that meets the needs of farmers across this country who are losing equity, increasing debt, and many, and many of them putting their farms up for sale?

Recently I stood on this floor and read to my colleagues a letter I received from a constituent who comes from a farming family of many generations. She called the American farmer an endangered species and asked if Congress even cared about saving them.

I care about saving the independent American farmer, Mr. Speaker. But the leadership of this Congress is very, very irresponsible. Where is the bill? Where is the beef?

Some Members of this Congress are doing all they can to get a bill out of here that addresses the concerns of farmers across this country. But many other Members are unaware or literally are playing politics by holding relief to our farmers hostage to other bills, literally putting a tourniquet on the credit so essential as life lines to farmers across this country.

It is awful that, while the American economy is at one of the strongest points in recent history, the benefits are not flowing to every community. In fact, the benefits are flowing out of the pockets and the bank accounts of our farmers.

They are continuing to experience significant declines in prices that began over a year ago. In fact, over the last 15 years, one would ask oneself the question: Why would one even want to be an independent farmer in America?

The price declines experienced by wheat and cattle producers over the last couple of years have now expanded across rural America to include the feed grains, oilseed, cotton, pork, rice, and now even the dairy sector at 50-year lows.

In some instances, prices are now lower than during the 1940s. Coupled with that is the increasing cost of production and farm equipment and fuel. Those prices do not go down, only up.

For the RECORD this evening, I want to submit some of these prices. Imagine how many bushels of wheat one would have to supply to a local grain company when wheat is now selling at \$2.66 a bushel. Fifteen years ago, it was selling at \$3.39. In corn, it is at all time

record lows, \$2 a bushel. In soybeans, \$5.05. Those prices had been on a continuing decline.

In cattle and steers, the prices continue to go down. Certainly in the hog area were at all time lows at \$35.41. It is almost amazing that one can buy an entire animal for that amount. Then of course one would have to add on the slaughter costs. But across this country, farmers are burying their animals. They cannot meet the cost of production.

These are people who work very, very hard for a living. Farm income is expected to fall by next year by an additional 20 percent. That means taking 20 percent of one's equity away from one. How would that feel for any American family?

□ 1945

We know that exports are also down, nearly 20 percent in the last 3 years. Exports of wheat are down 15.4 percent; corn is down 19.2 percent; soybeans down 8.3 percent; cotton down nearly half.

Is it any wonder that there is a cry across America in our rural communities? Farmers are losing their equity big time. The only question remains, how long can they hang on?

Total farm debt in the last 2 years is rising, over \$170 billion, nearly a 10 percent increase. Equity down, debt up. The drop in income, coupled with declining asset values for many producers, means they cannot obtain credit. This Congress should be guaranteeing that credit for America's farmers.

I ask again, where is the bill? Where is the beef?

Those who do obtain credit will find that they will be using it for cash expenses rather than for investment or for improvement. They will find themselves squeezed out as they try to repay debt on current income.

And prices for next year do not look any better. Many farmers who struggled with cash flow last year resulting from low prices and adverse weather will likely see their situation worsen as this year and next year move forward. In fact, the U.S. Department of Agriculture projects that the greatest financial strain in 1999, this year, will be on field crops: Wheat, corn, soybeans, upland cotton, rice. Net income will be 17 percent below previous 5-year averages. And this year current projections show there will be an additional 27 percent below the previous 5-year average.

My colleagues, this is very, very serious. And I think the political problem inside here in some ways reflects America's folly, taking our food production system for granted. Because, of course, we were only able to create this civilization when the tillers of the soil and those who raised our livestock were able to feed more than their own family, became more efficient, were able to feed the Nation and so much of the world. We came to take them for granted.

They only comprise 2.8 percent of those who work in America. They truly are a minority. And so most of the public does not even see the sweat on their brow, the debts that they have had to amass as they try to continue in the work that they love.

While the equity level of farmers is relatively high, farm lenders report that farmers are depleting their equity at a faster rate than earlier in this decade. And unlike the 1980s, when many of them loaned up and they got debt heavy, what this group now is doing, and the average age of farmers being about 55 years of age in America, they are saying, why take on more debt, why weather more of this crisis, let us get out of this business. What a tragedy for our country.

When we think about it, when we walk around the Capitol and we see all the statutes and look at the murals on the walls, what do they represent? They represent the abundance of this land; the ability of the American people to have a stable political unit built on independent farmers, independent ownership of land; the ability to survive and, in the process, to be able to produce enough to feed one's neighbors.

Most Americans do not pay more than 10 percent of their income for food. Most of the world pays over half of their income for food. We owe much to our farmers. We are blessed with fertile soil in this country and hard-working people. Our country was built on the sweat of their labor. In fact, they are so good, unfortunately, that most of the rest of the society does not even see them any more.

We cannot turn our back, Mr. Speaker, on our farmers, because they have never turned their back on us. This Congress, the leadership of this Congress tomorrow could bring up the emergency farm bill if there were the will. We ought to start with credit for planting this spring, but that is not sufficient. We have to look at price transparency. We have to look at risk management.

I want to say a word, before I recognize several of my colleagues who have joined me here this evening, about why it is so hard for farmers to make a living. If we look at the concentration that is continuing to afflict this industry and how difficult it is for an independent producer to make it in America, our independent farmers are being squeezed out.

If we take a look at pork, most Americans do not know that six companies in this country control the processing that brings that pork to America's tables, those ribs, that pork sausage. Companies like Smithfield, IBP, ConAgra, Cargill, Farmland Industries, and Hormel control 75 percent of all pork slaughter in this country.

If a farmer has animals and he wants to get them to market, he does not go to the retail store, he has to go to the processing company, and it is the processing company that decides whether his animal will get to market. The

processing company decides what that farmer will receive per pound for that animal, and they decide, generally by deals with the retail stores, on which shelves might that farmer's product arrive. The independent farmer has nothing to say about all of that.

In Ohio, the area where I come from, due to a lack of independent slaughter facilities and last year's closing of Thornapple's up in Michigan, along with the dumping of Canadian hogs on our market, our pork farmers in Ohio are suffering greatly. They are lucky if they can find companies willing to take their animals.

And it is not just in pork. In beef, four firms control 83 percent of all beef slaughter in this country, four firms control 73 percent of all sheep slaughter, and four firms control 62 percent of flour milling. And I can tell my colleagues this, at the regional level the concentration is even worse when farmers cannot find a way to get their products to market.

Truly, this is a battle between David and Goliath, and Goliath is winning.

I want to recognize some of my colleagues who have joined me this evening; certainly the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. BOB ETHERIDGE), who has been down here every day trying to get a bill out of this institution.

We have a Speaker from Illinois. There are lots of feed grains in Illinois. Why is a bill not moving? We have a Whip in this Chamber who is from Texas where cotton and cattle are in trouble. Why can we not move a bill out of this Chamber?

I yield to my colleague from North Carolina (Mr. ETHERIDGE) and thank him for his tremendous work and leadership on this issue, not just for his own State but for farmers across our country.

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) for putting together this important special order on the condition of American farmers at a time when the American farm economy is in deep trouble, as she has already stated, and the need for this body to stop playing politics and get a supplemental spending bill through.

There is no excuse for what is happening. Our farmers need help now. They really needed it last month. We tried to get a supplemental bill through, as the gentlewoman well knows, but politics prevailed over good sound policy.

I, as a member of the Committee on Agriculture, had to vote against the bill because it was that bad, as did many of the Members of this body, and it did not pass. The reason was we were taking money out of the international fund, where we were selling our products, to loan to farmers to produce, which is the craziest thing I have ever heard of. And this body realized it when it got to the floor. It was nothing more than a political game.

I am sorry I had to vote against it, but the point is, as the gentlewoman

has indicated, farmers are hurting. Farm families are in trouble all across this country. The need for American families to have us stop playing the partisan games are the greatest they have ever been, and the Republican majority has denied any relief to suffering farmers. They have denied that relief when we can do something about it, as the gentlewoman has indicated. It is in their power to bring it to the floor, it is within their power to let us pass it. Because if it gets to this floor, it will pass.

I grew up on a farm. I have a lot of my friends who still farm. It is a great life. I own a little piece of land. It is kind of hard for me to say I farm. I go out there a lot and check the cows, and my son spends a lot of time on the farm, almost every day. But farmers are hurting. I have been around farming all my life, and I do not remember a time when there has been more uncertainty, more turmoil, more economic devastation of such a broad scale in the agricultural community as there is today.

I was at a 4-H lamb show during the break with some friends, and an auctioneer came up to me and he said, "I want to say something." He did not know me. I had never met him. He said, "It hurts me to go and have farm sales, and I am having more farm sales now than any other type of sale I am having." And the shame is there is no one there to bid. The farmers' assets are going for a pittance.

In North Carolina almost no farmer has been spared, and I think this is true all across the country. Our tobacco farmers are close to facing the lowest production quota in the history of the tobacco program. That goes back to the mid 1930s.

Pork farmers, as the gentlewoman has shared, have experienced the lowest prices for live hogs in more than 50 years, for a variety of reasons. And cotton, peanut, dairy, corn, wheat and soybean farmers are being crushed by the low prices. They are being crushed by low prices and oversupply and no place to market their goods.

In these modern times there are an awful lot of people who really think they get their groceries at a grocery store, and they do, but what they forget is the farmers that produce those goods, that put them on the shelves.

I am here to say to my colleagues that if we want to keep having food come from the farm, as the gentlewoman has already indicated, we had better be about helping the farmers stay in business. Because if the independent farmers go out, and surely they will if we do not give them help, and we wind up with just the large mega corporate farms, America is going to be in deep trouble and we will pay a heavy price for it.

Food is a vital part of a country's national security. If we lose our ability to produce food, we will not have the underpinnings of a strong national security. We have a responsibility, and I

think a duty, to make sure our farmers survive. And not only survive, they should thrive.

It is absolutely not fair, when so many people in the country are deciding whether or not to roll over their IRAs and how to do it, and look at the stock dividends and watch the stock market, when farmers are watching their stock go to market and not even getting paid for it. That is not right.

We need to make sure our farmers survive and that our families have access to a safe and adequate food supply. It needs to be produced in the United States if we want to make sure it is a safe food supply.

The Freedom to Farm Act that passed here in 1996 has been an utter failure. There is no question about it. Talk to any farmer, they will tell my colleagues that. Promises were made in 1996 of a new and expanded market in exchange for an end to price supports and production controls. So what happened was the Republican majority in this Congress did away with the controls, but we did not fulfill the other part. We did not make sure they had markets for their goods. And if they do not have an overseas market, they are in trouble. And that is where our farmers are.

We have to be accountable to our farmers for the failure of that promise, and the only way we can be accountable is to put a bill on this floor that keeps them in business.

Ms. KAPTUR. Reclaiming my time for just a moment, the gentleman was talking about the importance of production in this country. I completely agree.

And also it is important to understand how our farmers are organized to produce; whether they become franchisees to some big processing company or whether they are allowed to own their own farmstead and make their own decisions on what they wish to raise and be able to pledge their own assets against borrowing.

What is happening so often across our country now, in order to survive, and I do not think most urban dwellers or suburban dwellers understand this, these farmers are oftentimes having to lock themselves into economic arrangements where they totally are losing their independence. They are no longer independent farmers.

Mr. ETHERIDGE. I thank the gentlewoman for those comments. That is absolutely true. If our farmers lose their independence, that is the very thing that has made America great.

Going back all the way to colonial days, as the gentlewoman mentioned earlier, is the fact that a person had a piece of ground, and it used to be said they had a mule. There are no longer mules in the country now. Those that came out of Missouri, we have now put tractors behind them and other things.

□ 2000

But the important thing was that they had their independence. We have

had a strong vibrant economy because of agriculture. When our agricultural economy gets in trouble, pretty soon the rest of us follow.

We started to do something last year to help the farmers when we passed the disaster relief bill, but not a dime of that money, not one dime of that money, has been sent to the farmers yet because of a whole variety of reasons.

Earlier this year, we passed, and I commend the majority for bringing this to the floor, legislation to free up loan reserves within the Department so that they can make money available to farmers. But that money is also gone, the reason being there is such a big need in the farm community, farmers need a lot of money in the spring to buy supplies to start the farm operations. They are huge users of credit.

The problem we have is, as my colleague indicated earlier, the commodity prices are so low, the lowest they have been in probably 50 years, they have very little reserves, they have grain and other commodities in the bins where they are stored. Unfortunately, those commodities are not worth anywhere near the amount they need to go to the bank and borrow money.

So it is up to us, I think, to step up and make sure they are in business and get through these tough times so that all of us can enjoy the bounty that we have enjoyed for so long. We have had the food in this country. We have been able to share it around the world. If we want to keep doing that, we better make sure that we make money available through the USDA to get to our farmers. But the money we already made available is gone.

The trouble in the farm economy is often the first step, as I said earlier, to a greater problem in the economy in America. And we better wake up and we better get a supplemental spending bill on this floor and the majority better do it for our farmers or we are all going to pay a heavy price.

And our farmers know who is in charge. Farmers across this country find themselves in the situation where they do not watch Wall Street. They cannot. They are watching Main Street, and Main Street does not look very good these days. The Wall Street bankers may deal with stocks, but if the Main Street banker cannot lend money to the farmers, a lot of us may not enjoy the kind of bountiful food at the cheap prices that we have enjoyed for so long.

This happened once before in our country in the 1930s. Different times. But the farmers got in trouble and we had the dust bowls in the Midwest because the farmers were not farming. That can happen again. It can very well happen in America. But this Congress can take action, and I challenge the Republican leadership to bring that bill to the floor so that we can give our farmers the help they need as they start this planting season.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, so we can let the American people know where this bill is whether it first came through the House, it had to then go to the Senate. The Senate has passed a bill. Under our rules, we now have to do what we say "go to conference." That means to work out the differences between the House and Senate bill.

The problem is the Senate has appointed conferees. But guess what? The leadership of this House has not appointed conferees. Therefore, we cannot clear a bill because they have not even worked out the differences.

It is now into the fourth month of this Congress, and spring planting is now. People have to make life-and-death decisions now. I have had seed companies call me from back home saying, "MARCY, I have debts from last year related to credit I extended, and I cannot do it again. I got a lot of farmers totally at risk here." And yet we are sort of fiddling here in this Chamber while rural America burns across this country and we cannot even get a conference committee appointed.

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, if the gentlewoman would yield further, she is absolutely correct. There is no excuse for it. There is no excuse when we have the power to do something about it. The majority does. We do not. The majority does.

We should move tomorrow. We should have a bill on this floor before we go home this weekend and we ought to pass it so that the farmers can go to work.

Planting season, as my colleague said, has started. And in the Southeast, for some of the crops, we are getting pretty far along already. And in my colleague's part of the country, they are going to be planting within the next week or so and some are probably getting land ready.

We need to act now, and it does not need to be next month.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. ETHERIDGE) for joining us and for being a vigilant voice not just for farmers in North Carolina but across this country and in trying to get the majority here to do what is right for our country.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BERRY), one of the most knowledgeable Members of the entire Congress on the subject of rural America and agriculture.

Mr. BERRY. Mr. Speaker, I am a bit sad this evening to have to come to this floor again to express the concern I have for America's farmers. I consider and have always considered myself, since the time I have been old enough to understand, privileged to be born a farmer. I still am. That is the way most of the members of my family for as far back as I know about. That is the way they have made a living. We never had a lot but we had enough.

And it is a sad thing to see the rest of the country prosper, and we are

proud of that, we are happy for them, at a time when America's farmers are in the worst situation that they have been in in this century. It is almost unbelievable that the same body, the United States Congress that passed Freedom to Farm, the same leadership that crammed Freedom to Farm down our farmers' throats when they begged not to do it, they knew this was a bad idea, for us to have to come to this floor tonight and once again ask the leadership of this House to do the right thing.

We are not asking them for a hand-out. We are not asking them to do anything except what they should do. Because they made a commitment when they passed Freedom to Farm. They basically said to America's farmers that they produce and we will help them sell it.

They did not pass fast track. They have not helped open up any new markets. They have basically let it go by the wayside and told America's farmers, good luck, guys, we hope you make it. It is like standing on the bank of the river while they know someone is about to drown and saying "good luck." But that is what is happening in this Congress right now.

It is unconscionable that the leadership has not appointed conferees and they have not dealt with this and it has already gone to the President's desk, and it is hard to believe.

America's farmers are the most productive people that have ever been known in the history of the world. There has never been another nation that it cost them so little to eat as it does this country. America's farmers have had an average increase in productivity of 3 percent annually since 1910. That is unmatched by any other industry anywhere in the world at any time in history. And it is unbelievable that the House is holding up this progress.

Our farmers are out there twisting in the wind right now. They need the loans that this money will provide. We have an obligation to them to see that it happens. All of the things that have been said here this evening are quite true. And it is just unbelievable to me that, as a branch of the Government, we do not do the right thing and do what we know is the right thing to do.

It is a national security issue. I was amazed a few weeks ago to hear leading economists say that agriculture was no longer an important part of America's economy, that the stock market had grown so big that it was almost insignificant. It is not important unless we happen to eat three times a day. Then it becomes pretty important to us.

America's farmers have done such an incredible job that we do not even notice what they do. But they are proud people. They are hard-working people. They work hard. They play by the rules, and all they ask is for an even break. Yet, after passing Freedom to Farm, basically doing away with the safety nets and saying, good luck, fel-

lows, the leadership and the majority party in this House has turned their back on America's farmers.

It is an amazing thing to me. I cannot imagine why they would want to do this. It is just amazing to me. The longer I live and the more I see, the more I am convinced that the further we get from our Jeffersonian roots, the further we get from an agrarian society, the more social problems we have.

I think there is great value not only in production of food but in rural America and what we learn and what we gain by having a strong rural America. Yet we are letting things like this, actions by the majority leadership, create a situation where rural America is threatened, where America's farmers are threatened, and it is something that just should not be allowed to happen.

I certainly hope that our leadership will take the responsibility. Let us hold them accountable, ask them to do the right thing, and bring this bill to conference, get it done, get it passed, get it on the President's desk, and do what we need to do for our farmers.

Once again, I thank the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) for holding this special order and appreciate the opportunity to participate.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BERRY) for his eloquent remarks this evening, which reflect not just an intellectual understanding of what agriculture means to this economy but his personal experience and bringing that kind of knowledge to this floor when so many of our Members do not know this particular industry firsthand, and to thank him for his sincerity and the weight of his arguments, which I know will help us as we try to carry the day here. He has been so convincing and his passion not just for people in Arkansas but across our country is completely demonstrated by his participating in this special order, and I want to personally thank him and thank the people of Arkansas for sending him here.

I could not help but think as he was talking about independent agriculture what has happened to our country. Farmers work very hard and they try to get their product to market, and there are these gatekeepers now and some of the big processing companies really do hold the leverage and power in the system. It has been my experience in dealing with some of those processing companies that they do not care whether the meat comes from America or whether it is imported, whether the grain comes from America or whether it is imported, whether the vegetables come from America or they are imported, because they can literally process anything and it really does not matter.

But I would just plead with my colleagues and plead with the American people who are listening this evening, think about the history of our country and what the roots of our freedom really are. When any segment of our society that has been so very important to

us is on the ropes, about to lose their independence, we are all connected to that, and only because we have had independently-owned agriculture for most of our history have we been able to maintain our freedoms and the political stability that we have known.

But if we look at what is happening to the processing of food today, if we look at the processing firms who racked up profits last year four times higher than in prior years, we have to begin to ask the question why, when we can buy an entire hog for \$40, the price does not go down in the store? When these companies, the processing firms, can buy volumes and volumes of product produced by our farmers, and yet the price really does not go down in the store, what is happening there to consumers?

Consumers need to be interested in this. We need to be asking our local grocer whether there are products on the shelves that come from local companies, local farmers. Where does the meat come from? Is it labeled? Where do the vegetables come from? Are they labeled? Are we eating American grown strawberries or strawberries from somewhere else?

Only 2 percent of the food that comes onto the tables of America is literally inspected at our borders. And last year we imported over \$30 billion worth of commodities into this country. And so, we begin to ask ourselves questions about the way this whole agricultural system has been transformed in the last 30 years.

It is a very different America than it was for our forebears. And the question for us today is, is this the system? Do we like the system the way it is? We have less than a million people in farming production agriculture today, and now we are going to wipe out thousands and thousands and thousands more. Is that really the America we want?

Try, if you are listening, call your local farmers, work with your local farm bureaus, work with your local associations, church groups, see if there is not a way to buy direct.

□ 2015

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEASE). The Chair reminds Members that they are to direct their remarks to the Chair and not the television viewing audience.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I would ask people to visit their farmers' market and take advantage of farm fresh produce. Ask your grocer to procure locally-grown products, even eggs, poultry. Very interesting to see how few are able to actually participate in supplying the shelves. That is not by accident. It is because of the system that we have today. We need local solutions, as well as national solutions, to this problem.

I would urge the Members, I would say to the Speaker, that the American people should call their Members of

Congress, particularly those in the leadership, and they should be asking for clearance of the emergency supplemental farm bill here in this Congress. It would only solve part of the problem. The biggest share remains ahead of us. If we could release credit for this spring, that would permit some of our farmers to remain in business.

But America must be concerned with the next generation of farmers and how she is going to preserve an independent agriculture, if at all, for the 21st century.

Mr. Speaker, I see our fine colleague, the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Mrs. CLAYTON), who has joined us this evening, who has spent her life working in rural development and is such an effective voice for the economic interests of all people, and I thank her very much for joining us and for her. I can tell the other Members and the Speaker pro tempore here this evening that she is really effective and communicates this message on agriculture every day to the people who need to move bills inside this Congress, and I thank her for joining us.

Mrs. CLAYTON. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) for holding the special order on the emergency need for the farm supplemental appropriation, and I thank her for all her leadership for rural America, but I thank her for bringing the opportunity that we can talk about in emergency.

In January of this Congress I was discussing the conditions of our farmers and the need to enact emergency legislation. In fact, the President also mentioned it in his State of the Union. Now more than a quarter of a year has passed, and we have yet to pass that legislation.

Mr. Speaker, what constitutes emergency? Emergency is a crisis, it is an exigent situation that demands urgent attention. We have a crisis in farming. We have an exigent situation that demands urgent attention.

Why then do we not have an emergency supplemental for agriculture? I believe we do not have an emergency supplemental bill almost four months later, after no Member of this Congress disputes that there is indeed an emergency. Everyone will tell you they understand that the farmers are suffering, and yet we do not respond to this.

I cannot imagine, if my colleagues understand what emergency is, and yet we have not done it. I think it is simply because we have misplaced our priorities. It is farmers are not that important to us. This Congress would rather fight for tax cuts for a few than help our farmers. We just passed the budget resolution; we took care of that, we pushed that. Last night, went to the Committee on Rules. Two o'clock, came out with a bill.

Three and a half months ago we talked about the bill for the emergency supplemental, and we do not have one yet. This Congress would rather pass a

budget amendment that no one has seen than help small farmers and ranchers who struggle. Everyone has seen and recognized. It is not like we did not know it. We admit, we understand they are suffering, but we have not done anything about that.

Small farmers and ranchers are struggling to survive in America. In fact, small farmers and ranchers are a dying breed, and I would say when I say small farmers, I mean independent farmers. And some of those may not be independent, but they are small in size because they do not have a big holding in investment, but they certainly have invested a lot of their resources; they are in debt up to their necks. They are a dying breed, and because they are dying, because they are diminishing, the quality and the affordability of food is at risk for all of us.

Now whether we understand or not, we are tied to their survival. Farmers and ranchers have been able to eke out a living in the past, are now finding out they are not able to do that. They are not even able to break even. Most are losing money, and they are fighting just to stay in farming by borrowing more money. Just to stay in farming they have to borrow more money. They are not making anything; they are losing. But they love farming so dearly they want to stay, and that is their way of life.

Just consider in 1862, the year that the Department of Agriculture was created, 90 percent of the population farmed for a living. Today America's producers represent less than 3 percent. By 1992 there were only 1.1 million small independent farms left in the United States, a 45 percent decline since 1959.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, it is amazing to think that a million farmers can feed 270 million people in this country and a third more abroad.

Mrs. CLAYTON. Yes.

Ms. KAPTUR. Millions and millions, to understand how magnificent the work that they do is.

Mrs. CLAYTON. That just shows us how efficient they are, and the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is right, how we are dependent on such a small number of people who are undergirding the support.

I am reminded, and I just say parenthetically reminded, that our former chairman, Democratic chairman of the Committee on Agriculture used to say if you wanted to know how important farmers were, he would tell the story about the submarine in World War II, and he was saying that the other countries would say how did you have such a superior submarine, or why were you able to stay there so long? And the answer was: We were able to be superior and hold our place as long as the food would last.

Now please understand that is symbolic of a military strength, but food is also symbolic of our national strength. It was important for our military, and it also is an important need for all of

our citizens. And so if those small farmers go out of existence, we just do not exist, we just do not exist. Farmers and farm families deserve a chance.

Before we had the Freedom of Farm bill of 1996, the farm price safety net was a shield against uncertain fluctuations in commodity prices. When the bill was considered, we referred to it as Freedom to Fail. I am sad to report that our ammunition has been far too accurate in that situation in North Carolina. According to a recent news report, the State's top farm commodities, hogs have experienced 50 percent drop in prices, 1996. Wheat is down in that State 42 percent, soybeans down 36 percent, corn 31 percent, peanuts 28 percent; turkey and cotton prices are down 23 percent since 1996. In fact, Mr. Speaker, there is no commodity in my State of North Carolina that makes money for farmers.

We must act now. If we do nothing about the real problem facing these hard-working citizens, they may not be there later at a later time. This is a time, if we are talking about saving them, we do not save them after they go out of business; we need to do it now. Congress must act now to relieve the pressure by providing the emergency supplemental funding.

I want to say that does not take care of all the problems, but at least that relieves the pressure that they need right now just to get in the field and just to start their whole production crop season again.

The emergency supplemental appropriation farm loan was the result of the unprecedented demand for agriculture credit due to the persistently low commodity prices across our Nation. The Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency needs an additional \$152 million in additional money in 1999 to provide credit and to deliver the services that farmers and ranchers need because of both the low prices and the weather.

On March 26 of this year USDA advised Congress and we passed a law to allow it to have the extraordinary emergency transfer action, which they took money out of their staffing of FSA to allow it to go into the credit insurance fund. Now that is a temporary provision. This transfer allows USDA to meet its urgent credit needs for farmers who maybe are planting now, but all that money is being spent. We are robbing Peter to pay Paul. This transfer obviously was a stopgap measure, but that has now ceased, so we really have run out of time.

The transfer of these funds also places FSA salaries and expense accounts in a deficit basis. My State, FSA work flow has experienced dramatic increases for a wide range of programs having considerable producer activity. While staff levels have been reduced by 25 percent from the 1993 levels, with the increased responsibility they simply cannot offer the service that our North Carolina farmers expect and deserve.

According to an official count, North Carolina is the most understaffed State in the Nation based on FSA work load criteria. At present we are understaffed by 56 employees. When I spoke with my State director earlier this afternoon, he said he could hire 25 additional people now, had he had the money for the salary. He also told me that his employees cannot go out in the field because there is not extra money for travel. We cannot tolerate that.

As my colleagues know, one has said that silence gives consent. We need to speak out against this. We need to speak to the leadership, that the leadership of this House must act now.

So I call on all my colleagues to call on our leader, for him to call on the appropriate people, to appoint the persons to the conference committee and to make sure that indeed we have an opportunity to move this forward, if not tomorrow, at least by Monday. We need to begin at least working out the differences between the Senate version and the House version.

Finally, as our farmers indeed survive, we will survive; and as rural America is hurting, they are tied to their farmers. Obviously all of us do not farm in rural America, but I can tell you we are tied to the farms' survival. As the farm indeed fails, much of Main Street, and much of infrastructure and school taxes, or rather the ability for the banks to survive also suffer, and this Nation, whether they understand it or not. Maybe only 25 percent of us may live in rural areas, and maybe only 1 percent or 1.1 million farmers farming, but they are undergirding us with the very basic of good food, quality food and fiber, that if they were not existing, we would not have that opportunity for that very basic.

And I thank the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) for her leadership in this role and her persistence, willingness, to come here and to urge our colleagues to do the right thing, and I just want to stay with her and break the silence, that we should not be giving consent that we understand there is a crisis and refuse to do anything about it.

I thank the gentlewoman for allowing me to participate.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Mrs. CLAYTON) for being here late this evening on behalf of America's farmers who need a voice in this Chamber. We must be their voice, we must get the leadership of this institution to move a bill. I wish we could move it this week because it could be done. We can work out these differences.

As the gentlewoman says, you can go up to the Committee on the Budget, they work until 2 a.m., and they get it done. A lot of our farmers are plowing their fields at 2 a.m. in the morning also. It is not a 9 to 5 job.

And as I was listening to the gentlewoman's remarks, I was thinking

about the song America the Beautiful, where we talk about the fruited plains, about the amber waves of grain, and how different America would look if we were to lose this tremendous productive capacity that we have. And most Americans probably say, "Well, gosh, we've, you know, had attrition of farmers over the whole century, so what makes this different?" What makes this different is the structure of the industry at the end of the 20th century and that, in fact, the people who are in farming today are what we would call the diehards. They are the ones that have survived downturns in the economy, the current depression in rural America, all kinds of drought, all kinds of disease. These are the best farmers. They have had to survive everything, and now we risk losing them because of the current economy and the inability of this Congress to clear a bill that will keep rural America functioning for the sake of the Nation.

And as the prior gentleman talked about the stock market and the gentlewoman talked about what is happening in the rest of the economy, as one of our former chairmen of our committee used to say, there is a difference between money and wealth. And Wall Street can generate a lot of dollars, but those really are rather representative; they are a mirror of what is happening elsewhere in the economy.

When you talk about rural America and the ability of independent farming to survive, you are talking about the real wealth of America spread among many owners, not a few, and what is really at stake today is the ability of that group of people to survive and prosper, or are they going to be franchisees of large processing firms if they are even allowed to remain in business at all? The situation in America today, at the end of the 20th century, is as serious as it has ever been.

And so I want to thank the gentlewoman for being down here tonight. Along with her, the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Mrs. CLAYTON), the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. ETHERIDGE) and also the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BERRY). We again make a plea to the leadership of this Chamber that delay is not an option.

The Speaker of this House and the other body, the other body's leadership, are fiddling while rural America burns. America needs our independent farmers, Mr. Speaker, and they need us. They need this Congress.

And so I ask the leadership: Where is the emergency farm bill? Where is the beef?

TAXES, SOCIAL SECURITY AND RETIREMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. MCINNIS) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.